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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 001978

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM NL

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/DETAINEES: SECRET PRISONS COULD BECOME
ELECTION ISSUE

REF: STATE 146996

Classified By: Amb. Roland E. Arnall; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary: Dutch press and parliamentarians of all stripes are expressing disappointment and/or outrage over the revelation of CIA-operated secret prisons for high-value detainees. Foreign Minister Bot is coming under intense pressure, including from his own party, for misleading Parliament during an earlier debate and for "trusting" USG assurances. Bot has been called to appear at an emergency debate in Parliament on September 13. Prime Minister Balkenende has also expressed concern. As a result of the prison revelations, the subject of CIA flights will also be reopened here. With the Dutch elections less than three months away, debate on both subjects is likely to be intense.

End summary.

Media Criticism Is Intense

¶12. (U) Dutch press coverage of the revelation that the CIA operated secret prisons for high-value detainees, including possibly in Europe, has run from unfavorable to hostile. Most papers concentrated on factual reporting of the emerging political controversy, while at least two (independent left NSC Handelsblad and left of center Trouw) carried intensely hostile commentary. NSC Handelsblad blasted the U.S. for deceiving its allies and ignoring international human rights conventions, and Trouw reported from Washington that the President's speech was nothing but a political ploy in the run-up to the U.S. mid-term elections. Several popular pundits stressed that the President's admissions mean nothing, as long as Guantanamo remains open and the use of secret prisons and harsh interrogation methods are not

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entirely repudiated.

Parliamentary rivals pillory FM Bot

¶13. (C) Parliamentary foreign policy spokesmen from all major parties also reacted negatively to the President's speech. MP Henk Jan Ormel, parliamentary foreign policy spokesman for senior coalition partner Christian Democrats (CDA), remarked in hearings that, "This is not how you treat an ally." Opposition Labor party (PvdA) foreign policy spokesman Bert Koenders added, "Our trust in the U.S. has been damaged," and demanded that the Foreign Minister repair the damage. In a private meeting with Ambassador Arnall and visiting USNATO Permrep Nuland, both reiterated their earlier public statements. Koenders added that while all major Dutch political parties are "friends of the U.S." and understand

the need to combat terrorism, the damage to the relationship will have to be repaired. An emergency debate on the issue is now scheduled for Wednesday, September 13.

¶4. (C) D66 MP Lousewies van der Laan, whose party recently withdrew from the coalition government, forcing early elections, attacked Bot for not having forced the U.S. "to be open about the issue." A number of other spokesmen, primarily from the left-leaning opposition parties, also criticized Bot for either deliberately deceiving the Dutch people by not revealing the presence of the prisons earlier, or for being naive and overly "trusting" of the United States. Parliament has scheduled a plenary debate for Wednesday, September 13, during which Bot's credibility will again be under attack.

Government Reaction

¶5. (C) Prime Minister Balkenende on September 8 expressed disappointment about the revelation of the secret prisons during his weekly press conference, stating that it was "too bad this has happened this way." Balkenende's senior foreign policy advisor, Karel van Oosterom, later called the Embassy to stress that the Prime Minister's comments were made "as a concerned friend." Balkenende's press office informed us that some evening newspapers that reported Balkenende was "irritated" with the U.S. were misconstruing his remarks. Foreign Minister Bot publicly noted that he was "surprised" by the revelations, but denied feeling "had" by the U.S. He stressed that there should not be "too many such cases" of Allies keeping secrets from each other, and said that he would be seeking additional clarification from the USG.
(Note: Bot's private comments reported septel.)

¶6. (C) In a meeting with Ambassadors Arnall and Nuland,

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Dutch MFA Political Director Pieter de Gooijer said that three issues would likely dominate the Parliamentary debate: 1) whether FM Bot was lied to by the USG; 2) how to move past the current crisis to find a better way to communicate between allies; and 3) whether Parliament should set new restrictions on how the GONL deals with such issues in the future. Another issue likely to emerge in the debate is whether Dutch territory was involved in any way with regard to the secret prisons and prisoners. Although some Parliamentarians will certainly seek to "assign guilt," according to de Gooijer, the GONL will do its best to move past this phase and focus on working together in the future. In the same meeting, van Oosterom added that the GONL will do its best to ensure that the Parliamentary debate does not affect the Dutch deployment to Afghanistan. Separately, Dutch Ambassador-at-Large for Human Rights, Piet de Klerk, told Ambassador on September 7 that he believed the U.S. is "moving in the right direction," and was happy with the increased level of transparency. This view has been seconded by other MFA officials with whom we have spoken.

ARNALL